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SUBJECT: U.S.-EGYPT COUNTERTERRORISM WORKING GROUP MEETING

REF: CAIRO 292

Classified By: Minister-Counselor for Economic and Political Affairs
William R. Stewart for Reasons 1.4(B) and (D).

1.(S) Summary: On February 24, the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) hosted the third annual meeting of the U.S.-Egypt Counterterrorism (CT) Joint Working Group (JWG). State S/CT Coordinator Ambassador Dell Dailey led the interagency U.S. delegation which included representatives from NEA and OES. Embassy representatives included the Legal Attach, the Treasury Attach, the Regional Security Officer, and members of the Mission's Political-Economic Section. The Egyptian side included representatives from the MFA, the Ministry of Interior and the Egyptian Central Bank. The two delegations discussed issues and cooperative proposals regarding CT in North and East Africa, methods to target radicalization and violent extremism, terror finance, bioterrorism defense, cyberterrorism, and new CT training opportunities. End summary.

CT Threats in Africa

2.(C) The USG opened the discussions with a threat brief on terrorism in the Trans-Sahara and Horn of Africa regions. Ambassador Dailey emphasized that Al-Qa'ida in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) represents a significant threat to regional governments as well as US and Western interests, noting broader USG concern with AQ's interest in recruiting regional terrorist groups to its cause. AQIM has shown a willingness to use suicide tactics and risk high civilian casualties. The most prominent of this new wave of attacks has been two multiple-target mass-casualty bombings inside Algiers, on April 11 (attacks on the Prime Minister's office and a police headquarters) and on December 11, 2007 (attacks on Algeria's Supreme Court and on the UN headquarters for Algeria). In a September 2007 attack targeting President Bouteflika, AQIM used a suicide vest, another first.

3.(C) Dailey went on to note that AQIM has stated its aim to target U.S. and other western interests, a change in strategy from the GSPC and LIFG. In Algeria, it has carried out its threat in attacks on buses belonging to American (December 2006), Russian (March 2007), and French (October 2007) companies, in addition to the December 11 attack on the UN. AQIM has traditionally operated in Algeria and northern Mali, and has also recruited and trained small numbers of extremists from Tunisia, Morocco, Nigeria, Mauritania, and Libya. Some of these trainees may have returned to their home countries to plot attacks against local and Western interests. Approximately 36% of foreign fighters detained in Iraq come from North Africa - especially from Algeria, Libya, Tunisia, and Morocco - with smaller numbers from Mauritania. Dailey emphasized that Libya has the highest per capita

percentage of foreign fighters, suggesting high levels of radicalization. Dailey then briefly summarized the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP), created in 2005. TSCTP's aim is to strengthen regional counterterrorism capabilities by enhancing and institutionalizing cooperation among the region's security forces, including law enforcement, promoting democratic governance, discrediting terrorist ideology, and countering radicalization and reinforcing our bilateral military ties. The overall goal that the USG seeks to achieve via TSCTP is to facilitate cooperation between those countries and our Maghreb partners in the war on terror (Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia), and enhance the indigenous capacities of the Sahel states (Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Chad, plus Nigeria and Senegal) to withstand the challenges posed by terrorist groups in the region.

4.(S) S/CT Regional Affairs Officer made specific points about USG CT efforts in East Africa. He began by noting concerns regarding the sustainability of the USG CT relationship with Sudan, given the lack of progress on Darfur and other matters. He added that our relationship benefits Sudanese and regional security, including that of Egypt, and urged the GOE to use its influence with Sudan to encourage it to sustain this relationship in the face of an al-Qaida threat that endangers us all. Regarding Somalia, S/CT noted encouraging signs of outreach by the new Somali Prime Minister, Nur Hassan, and signals of developing fissures between the political opposition based in Asmara, and the al-Shabaab. S/CT emphasized that the USG sees the al-Shabaab as a terrorist gang that has no future and requested the GOE encourage both Nur Hassan and the political opposition to come to an accommodation that will marginalize the extremists, allow for Ethiopian withdrawal, and create the foundations for a more secure Somalia.

5.(S) A senior Ministry of Interior official, General Ibrahim Hamad, responded for the GOE, discussing the interconnected nature of most African terrorist and extremist groups and the Muslim Brotherhood (MB). Hamad emphasized that most of these regional groups draw their original inspiration from the ideology of the MB. According to Hamad, within their own borders, the Egyptians have had a great deal of success in combating the MB. He emphasized that GOE security services have also been successful in getting many extremists to renounce violence. With that said, he also shared USG concerns about the spread of former GSPC elements throughout North Africa, and noted that some AQIM cells were headed to - or had arrived in - both Somalia and Darfur in response to announcements about placement of foreign troops in each location. On the issue of Sudan in particular, the GOE stated that a unified Sudan is necessary for Egyptian national security. Hamad added that no one can accept genocide in Darfur, emphasizing that dialogue with the Sudanese is more preferable than ostracism.

6.(C) Hamad also emphasized Egyptian involvement in region-wide efforts to combat the current threat. He emphasized that the rate of successful attacks in the NEA region remains low, due mostly to cooperation between regional security services. One of the main reasons that regional cooperation has become an imperative is because of terrorists increased reliance on the internet and non-traditional forms of communication and recruitment.

Training Assistance

7.(C) The JCG then transitioned into an overview and discussion of CT training cooperation between the U.S. and Egypt. Ambassador Ashraf Mohsen, Deputy Assistant Foreign Minister for Counter Terrorism, led off by emphasizing the GOE's satisfaction with the type of CT training that MOI officials have been receiving over the past several years. He emphasized, though, that they wish to explore the possibility of being involved with training in conjunction with TSCTP countries, or even as a full participant in the

Partnership. This "trilateral" training that the GOE envisions focuses on GOE trainers and facilities being utilized to train Maghreb or Sahel states, backed by USG funding. The GOE also requested more detailed training to confront cyber-terrorism and cyber-threats. This could include course offerings via the State Department's Anti-Terrorism Assistance Program, as well as other technical assistance programs offered by the GOE. Embassy RSO noted that the USG has spent \$11 million over the past 9 years toward ATA training for Egypt, and we hope to continue and build upon this programming. He added that we can prioritize additional cyber-related courses that the GOE wants, though Egypt will need to furnish USG trainers with specifics on what courses they are seeking. Dailey also promised to follow-up on the GOE proposal for a possible trilateral arrangement between the U.S., Egypt and other countries in North Africa for training, but cautioned that the USG had not decided to go forward with such a program; noting that we would first need to gain agreement within the USG and identify sources of funding.

Terrorist Finance

8.(C) Samir el Shehad of Egypt's Money Laundering Combating Unit at the Central Bank (Egypt's Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU)) led off by mentioning that Egypt is eager to join the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) and that he would also like to see more African countries join the Egmont Group (the international body of FIUs). He suggested that this would be a good way to involve African countries in the fight against terrorist finance. Embassy Treasury Attach replied that the U.S. strongly supports the development of countries' FIUs, and is providing some technical assistance to some of the African countries which are trying to establish FIUs or have new FIUs. He noted that the U.S. is also sponsoring the candidacy of some FIUs which are hoping to join Egmont. Regarding membership in the FATF, he commented that while the membership is slowly growing, FATF wishes to expand in a cautious and deliberate manner. He said he would seek guidance from the Department of Treasury, and Dailey added that the State Department would assist as needed in order to provide the GOE with an answer.

Cooperation on Bioterrorism Defense

9.(SBU) With State OES leading the brief and discussion, the U.S. introduced for the first time the possibility of bilateral bioterrorism-related collaboration -- with a positive GOE response. In January 2008 (reftel), the U.S. had proposed four areas of bilateral CT cooperation on bioterrorism including approaches to food defense and agroterrorism, forensic epidemiology for multi-sectoral investigation of suspected bioterrorism, and scientific and technical cooperation on bioterrorism risk assessment methodologies and pathogen security. OES provided detailed proposals on these areas of cooperation based on GOE input from January.

10.(SBU) GOE officials welcomed the U.S. proposals and expressed some interest. Mohsen signaled that he would relay the proposals to relevant GOE subject matter experts for further review, with the promise to respond in the coming months.

Al-Azhar University Proposal

11.(SBU) Mohsen next discussed a GOE proposal for the training of imams through Egypt's Al-Azhar University. The GOE has developed this proposal with the intent to better combat radicalization and radical ideologies. The GOE has divided this proposal into several key "pillars." The first is to focus on the training of non-Egyptian imams in an 8-10

week course focusing on the basics of Islam. Second, the coursework would feature specialized training in foreign languages, social customs, and local politics tailored to foreign locales where many of the Egyptian imams will be sent. The program will also include Arabic language instruction for non-Arabic speaking imams. Third, Al-Azhar will translate primary Islamic sources into foreign languages. Fourth, Al-Azhar wants to establish Arabic and English websites focused on countering radical ideologies. Finally, the GOE hopes to use this program to support the visit of Al-Azhar scholars to foreign countries in order to combat violent ideology, but also to dispel myths propagated about Islam, primarily in the West. The GOE emphasized that approximately 40 countries have expressed interest thus far, primarily sub-Saharan African states. Many of these states lack the funds to support sending their imams in great numbers, and thus the GOE is looking to acquire foreign donor support. The estimated tuition to train foreign imams has been placed at L.E. 6500 (approximately \$1200). Dailey agreed to consider the proposal, in coordination with Embassy Cairo.

Foreign Fighters in Iraq

12.(S) In his brief on foreign fighters in Iraq, Dailey emphasized that Egypt and the U.S. enjoy a strong CT relationship, and GOE security services have been aggressive in targeting foreign terrorist cells and facilitation networks. Over the past year alone, GOE actions and coordination with partner regional services have led to the disruption of multiple foreign terrorist nodes. Dailey went on to show how recently unearthed information from safe houses in Iraq, coupled with debriefs conducted of AQI facilitators, have shed much light on foreign terrorist networks which are sending fighters to Iraq. Documentation obtained provides an unprecedented level of detail pertaining to these foreign fighters, including names, dates of birth, and route of entry used to enter Iraq. After summarizing the source countries from which these foreign fighters emanated - culled from the documents seized - Dailey briefly summarized the primary transit routes which they utilized. While noting that Damascus Airport remains the primary air-transit point for these Iraq-bound terrorists, he also noted specific Syrian efforts to increase security in this regard. Dailey added that, nonetheless, more action is required on the part of the Syrian government, and urged the GOE to engage with their Syrian interlocutors and urge them to increase border security measures, tighten visa procedures, and increase information sharing with regional states.

Pakistan-Afghanistan Threat

13.(C) Dailey next gave a brief overview of threats emanating from Afghanistan and the Pakistan-Afghanistan border regions. He noted that the U.S. initially achieved considerable success on the Afghan side of the border. That success has been disrupted by drug cultivation, the proceeds of which are funding the Taliban and enabling it to buy manpower. He added that USG efforts at disrupting the drug trade have had mixed results. On interdiction, results have been adequate, but there has been no success on eradication or demand reduction. Part of the difficulty is that the U.S. military's mission does not include counter-drug operations. As a result, the security situation is deteriorating. Dailey noted that the USG would like Pakistan to be more aggressive on its side of the border adding that, with U.S. assistance, Pakistan established an intelligence fusion center in the tribal regions. He mentioned the presence of Batullah Mehsud's network in Pakistan, adding that the GoP is very aware of the danger he and other Taliban leaders pose. He emphasized that the USG continues to work with Pakistan to ensure that it has the necessary tools to confront the extremists. This is not restricted to military aid as Pakistan understands that confronting extremism takes more

than military action.

14.(U) State S/CT has cleared this message.

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